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ABSTRACT

This booklet, which is intended for practitioners in continuing higher education, examines the rationale for forming partnerships with professional associations and examines considerations in developing and maintaining partnerships. The booklet begins with a few examples of the types and scope of partnerships possible between continuing education and professional associations. Outlined next are reasons for forming partnerships, their potential benefits, and preliminary steps in establishing them. Some perceptions commonly held by professional associations about continuing education are mentioned along with ways of overcoming them. Considerations in identifying potential partners are presented along with eight essential/desirable criteria for selecting partners (for example, the university and association must have common but not competing goals, relationships must be mutually beneficial, key decision makers must support the relationship, and stable organizational environments and/or broad-based supports are needed). The remaining sections are devoted to the following topics: identifying preconditions and bases of interaction; structuring partnerships (building strong foundations based on cooperation, coordination, and collaboration); approaching potential partners (strengthening the institutions' positions in partnerships by obtaining internal support and initiating the first meeting); making the partnership work (establishing partnership agreements, interacting with associations, ending partnerships); and using partnerships to open doors to new audiences. (MN)

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BUILDING PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATE PARTNERSHIPS

BY DONNA S. QUEENEY

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BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS

WITH PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

BY DONNA S. QUEENEY

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BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS WITH PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

BENEFITS OF PARTNERSHIPS WITH ASSOCIATIONS 3

PRELIMINARY STEPS TO PARTNERSHIPS 5

IDENTIFYING POTENTIAL PARTNERS 7

STRUCTURING PARTNERSHIPS 11

APPROACHING POTENTIAL PARTNERS 12

MAKING THE PARTNERSHIP WORK 13

- **A 20-year partnership** between a large midwestern university and a national professional association delivers a five-week update program for association members each year.
- **A two-week executive leadership program** is the primary product of a collaborative relationship between a private university and a major professional association.
- **A southern state university** provides two faculty members on retainer to another association.
- **Use of technology**—specifically a land-based microwave system—is the focus of a state professional association's partnership with a school in a western state university system.

From selecting potential partners to structuring the partnership and making it work, this publication discusses benefits you can expect to gain from entering into partnerships with professional associations and practical steps to building the relationship. Examples are taken from actual situations, though organizations involved have not been identified due to some requests for anonymity. To provide a realistic picture of perceptions you may be called upon to counter, the professional association's perspective is also discussed.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS IS HARD WORK

Why, then, should those of us in continuing higher education go out of our way to build partnerships with professional associations rather than devote our full time and energy to forging ahead independently?

The complexity of today's world, complete with exponentially increasing knowledge and exploding technology, makes it extremely difficult for organizations, no matter how dedicated and creative, to work effectively in isolation. We no longer can expect to have all the resources needed to meet our goals. Continuing higher education and professional associations bring different, but frequently complementary, perspectives, resources, and missions to the table, and both share a commitment to meeting the educational needs of midcareer *professionals. By joining forces we often can address practitioners' needs with solutions that neither of us would be able to accomplish independently.

Partnerships can be established to carry out a single project or program, or they can become relationships that exist and flourish over time, through many projects. Current trends toward a problem-solving approach to work (Stewart, 1995) encourage an ongoing variety of relationships in which organizations come together for a specific purpose, then move away and coalesce into other partnerships to meet other needs. With no need for organizational monogamy, higher education institutions and professional associations may be involved in several of these partnerships simultaneously, each to tackle a different project. However, given the time and effort that go into building partnerships, long-term relationships addressing multiple projects are highly desirable.

* For the purposes of this paper, the term professional is used in the broadest sense, to refer to practitioners across a range of occupational fields.

BENEFITS OF PARTNERSHIPS
WITH PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

In considering partnerships with professional associations, we must consider both the benefits of such relationships to our institutions and the characteristics of professional associations that may make a partnership with us attractive to them. Professional associations are eager to provide services to members, and related to that, to gain new members. Developing, providing, and regulating continuing education activities offer them avenues for meeting these goals. They want to protect the integrity of the professions they represent by promoting high standards for educational activities, and to maintain and enhance those professions' reputations by helping their members remain competent. In some cases, associations also address education as a union-negotiated benefit. And more recently, several associations have begun to consider the development of credentialing programs, a task they agree they cannot undertake without substantial assistance. If we can help them fulfill these missions, they are likely to view a potential partnership with us positively.

For those of us in continuing higher education, associations have access to the very people who are, or can be, our students, and to information about these students' educational needs. Associations can bring to us the perspective of the clients we strive to serve. Associations may have ready access to experts who can make substantial contributions to the instructional content of educational activities developed through our partnerships with them. They also may have other resources, such as annual conferences or facilities for program delivery. And finally, associations may provide credentialing frameworks within which the instruction provided by higher education can take place.

Why should higher education be interested in partnerships with associations? They can help us achieve our goals, among them the delivery of educational programs. Through continuing education, we seek to disseminate research results and to highlight our outstanding faculty members. We want to provide professional development opportunities for faculty members, and to facilitate their contacts with people working in the fields about which they teach. We want to serve our constituencies, and to make friends for political and fund-raising purposes. And we must acknowledge that one of our purposes is to generate revenue for our institutions. Professional associations can provide the linkages and resources to help us do all of these things.

In considering building partnerships, we also must consider what we can bring to the associations. Within our institutions we have the expertise to design, develop, and deliver educational programs. Colleges and universities can provide academic credit when appropriate, and we lend an air of legitimacy to educational endeavors. Many higher education institutions also have the resources to help professionals and other association members become self-directed lifelong learners. Those of us concerned with adult education know that successful adult learners are indeed self-directed learners, but often professionals are not prepared to assume this role. They need to be able to approach their continuing education intelligently, and to control it so that they get what they want and what they need. Colleges and universities also can provide support services for association members. These may include such things as needs assessment and the development of curricula for lifelong learning that allow members to select continuing professional education activities within the context of a coherent program or plan rather than simply choosing what is available. The

libraries or media centers available in colleges and universities are important in the support of adult learners, as are our linkages to other colleges and universities, organizations, individuals, and programs. Higher education can also provide career counseling and continuity of both program and records. Not inconsequentially, in many cases it is higher education that has access to the technology necessary for delivery of distance education.

Why the Need for Partnerships Is Growing

Continuing higher education/professional association partnerships are not new, but as we move into the 21st century the importance of establishing such relationships is increasing for several reasons:

- **As limited resources** force many of us to focus our efforts, we tend to develop our strengths and look to external collaborators to supplement our resources and competencies in other areas. For example, a continuing educator who wants to feature a faculty member's research may need help developing a program that will put that research in context for professionals.

- **Technology continuously improves** the ways in which we operate, and it makes possible previously unknown activities. However, technology can be costly, so that organizations may need to form partnerships to gain access. A professional association with the content expertise necessary to produce continuing legal education may seek a partner with distance education delivery capabilities, for example.

- **Demands for accountability** have increased for both our institutions and the professional associations. Students, clients, customers, and members are requesting—and expecting— measurable results and value added from their educational participation or association membership, leading organizations to look beyond their own capabilities and resources to meet these expectations. Continuing educators may have the ability to assess professionals' educational needs, for example, but need a professional association to link them with a sample of practitioners to participate in the assessment.

- **Part of the changing face of higher education** is a greater concern with outreach of all types. In many of our institutions, continuing education must either aggressively take the lead or be left behind by this movement. If we are to assume leadership for university outreach, we must demonstrate the range of capabilities necessary to do so. The ability to build partnerships is one of those capabilities.

- **Expectations that continuing education will generate significant revenue** are escalating. Alliances with professional associations can connect us to new audiences, expanding our opportunities to raise income levels.

In a simpler era, the expectations of continuing higher education were more internally generated, within our units, and they often were less demanding. The resources necessary to meet those expectations generally were not extensive or beyond the reach of the average institution. These somewhat comfortable conditions no longer exist. As we reach for new levels of success, or even strive to maintain our current positions, the contributions that potential partners can bring to our activities are most attractive. Continuing

higher education/professional association partnerships offer particular opportunities since both organizations strive to serve many of the same clients. While most often established between two organizations, such partnerships can involve several groups. The principles described below can be applied to multi-group partnerships as well as to those involving only two organizations.

PRELIMINARY STEPS
IN ESTABLISHING PARTNERSHIPS

For any partnership to be successful, there must be a clear goal, or purpose, for establishing the relationship: what is it that the two partners will do together, and why are both parties necessary to accomplish this goal? A continuing education unit may recognize that its institution's civil engineering faculty members are nationally known in their field, for example, and perceive an opportunity for developing programs highlighting their expertise. However, they also may realize that they know little about the potential audience for this information: who comprises that audience, how to reach them, and in what manner the information should be presented to be of use to them. A professional association counting civil engineers among its members could answer those questions, and by working with the continuing educators to provide meaningful educational activities could expand its member services. The joint development and delivery of programs may seem to be the most obvious goal of continuing higher education/professional association partnerships, but it need not be the only one. Educational needs assessment also can provide a strong impetus for collaboration, as can program evaluation. Whatever the goal, it must be clearly articulated so that we can present it to potential partners in a readily understandable manner.

If a partnership is to be successful, each party must have something to contribute to the endeavor, and agree to contribute it. Such an arrangement builds a sense of ownership and obligation for both parties, and it provides for a true sharing of the work and responsibility involved. Without this commitment, the relationship may be nothing more than a linking of names, such as occurs, for example, if an association agrees to have its name listed as sponsoring an educational activity but has no role in planning, promoting, or delivering that activity. While such relationships do no harm, they cannot be considered true partnerships but are more accurately described as arrangements of convenience, usually quite temporary in nature.

Some Perceptions That May Have To Be Overcome

Some cautions about professional associations' perceptions of relationships with colleges and universities merit our attention. These are not presented to discourage our work with them, but rather to alert us to some of the attitudes we may have to address and overcome.

- Some professional associations that have worked with continuing higher education in the past **question the support we have within our own institutions.** More than one professional association representative has spoken, with some bitterness, about continuing higher education's failure to meet its commitments because we find ourselves unable to deliver university resources as promised. The disappointed would-be

partners say that if they are to enter into relationships with higher education in the future, they will require assurance that "someone above the person I'm working with won't countermand a decision." From their experience these people feel that continuing higher education has demonstrated that we are not in the mainstream, and that our activities don't command the same level of commitment that they might get elsewhere in our institutions. They accuse us of "not acting like a business."

- Other professional association representatives claim that "half of the **faculty members don't relate well to practitioners,**" or, put more positively, "A limited number of faculty members understand practice and can teach." These professional association spokespersons want opportunities to evaluate faculty members' teaching before agreeing to work with them, and to have an opportunity to veto their participation.

- A related concern is that **academics often fail to stay current,** to keep up with new directions within a profession. One association's director of professional development reports his horror at listening to a faculty member propose a program on a method that had been abandoned as obsolete almost two years earlier.

- **Higher education charges too much.** Professional associations often tend to look only at out-of-pocket costs, and do not see why higher education overhead fees or program coordination charges, for example, are necessary.

- **Colleges and universities move too slowly.** Professional associations want to respond to current problems currently. They are impatient with what they consider higher education's red tape and slow pace.

While these perceptions are problems we must address, positive perceptions exist as well. Professional associations frequently indicate because certain college and university programs have outstanding reputations, expertise in specific areas, or a strong alumni base, partnerships with these institutions are especially attractive to them. Comments such as these encourage us to build on our strengths.

From the first steps of recognizing a goal that merits establishing a partnership and identifying potential partners, the implementation of true partnerships requires considerable effort and a good deal of foresight. Before seriously considering a partnership, it's important to be realistic about the careful planning, establishment of processes and ground rules, behavioral factors, and concessions that will be necessary for a partnership to operate effectively. The solid commitment of both parties, mutual respect, and the demonstration of trust-to-build-trust will be essential. In order to work together organizations have to give up a little to gain a little—or a lot. This means that an organization participating in any but the most casual partnership will lose some of its flexibility and decision-making freedom in order to benefit from what the other partner has to bring to the relationship. It is important, too, to recognize that it takes a little humility for higher education institutions and associations to work together. Those of us from higher education must realize that associations may be better at doing some things than we are. Many associations today have directors of education who are every bit as well qualified as the continuing educators to be found in educational institutions. Like our potential partners, we have to be able to admit what we can, and cannot, do.

IDENTIFYING POTENTIAL PARTNERS

KEY TO SUCCESS

Selecting an appropriate partner is key to the success of any relationship. A professional association may initiate discussion of a partnership with us, and most of the suggestions offered here will apply in those situations. However, the following discussion is based on the situation in which the continuing educator initiates potential partnerships. In either case, the continuing educator must be able to sort out those groups with which a solid relationship appears feasible from those that hold less promise.

Brainstorming to develop an inclusive list of possible partners is a good place to start. It may be possible to generate an initial list by talking with faculty members, learning of groups with which they are involved or that they know to have needs complementary to ours. A list of those professions in which practitioners are required to have continuing education for continued practice may yield groups whose interests are compatible with ours, or we may simply identify associations representing an audience (e.g., architects, Realtors) we would like to serve. Depending on the goals we have established for our partnership, we may seek to work with state or national associations, or with both. Most national professional associations have state, and often even regional, chapters, so that it is possible to build a partnership involving an association at two or more levels.

It is important to realize that not all professional associations are likely partners. This is not to say that they should be eliminated from consideration, but we should be aware of their preferences and past practices. Some associations are institutionally based. Because these groups work only with their member institutions, a partnership is feasible only if our institution is a member. Other groups, particularly those representing medical specialties, traditionally have built alliances with affiliated organizations, such as state, regional, and local medical societies, rather than with higher education. Some professional associations have longstanding partnerships with one institution, usually to provide a special program or course. While they may be open to similar arrangements with other colleges and universities, it is helpful to know of existing relationships and to avoid touching on those areas in which an association already has a commitment.

Some professional associations will not consider entering into a relationship with an institution that does not offer a program to prepare people to enter the profession they represent. Other groups, usually those representing newer, or emerging, professions, feel that an institutional partner need not have a professional school in the field they represent. They may be eager to benefit from the program design, development, and delivery expertise, as well as the credibility, that a college or university can provide, and believe that they can identify continuing education faculty to provide the necessary academic support. Some professional associations have been known to require the involvement of faculty members, department chairs, or deans if they are to consider establishment of a partnership with a college or university. For example, the director of continuing education for one large association notes that virtually all of their partnerships with institutions of higher education are developed through the academic college in which their profession is addressed, most often at an administrative, rather than individual faculty member, level.

SELECTION CRITERIA

Once a list of potential partners has been developed, selection criteria can help us evaluate the feasibility of developing a good partnership with each group on the list. These criteria can be divided into two categories: (1) those criteria that are *essential*, that must be met if we are to pursue a partnership, and (2) those that are *desirable*, but not required for a successful relationship (Queeney and Melander, 1984). Essential criteria may remain similar over time, or they may change. Desirable criteria will more often change depending on circumstances. However, no single set of either essential or desirable criteria will be appropriate in all situations. The characteristics we are seeking in a partner will vary according to our goals and our organizational strengths and priorities at a given time.

Essential Criteria

The following examples of *essential* criteria certainly are not inclusive, and they don't apply in all situations. However, they may provide some understanding of what types of criteria an institution might advance as being required if they are to form a partnership with a professional association.

- The college or university and the association must share **common, but not competing, goals**. A professional association may want to demonstrate an increase in the effect of mandated continuing education on practice of the profession they serve, while a continuing higher education unit may want to increase revenues from continuing professional education. For both groups the common goal of expanding available offerings of quality continuing education for the specific professional group is compatible with their individual pursuit of increased member services, on the one hand, and increased programming income on the other.

- Any relationship must be **mutually beneficial**, so that both the higher education institution and the association have something to gain. In the case cited above, the professional association could benefit from higher education's skill in conducting a needs assessment, for example, and from its instructional design expertise. The continuing higher education unit would gain access to a population of professionals who could participate in the development and design of educational activities and help them understand the practice-related educational needs of their field.

- **Key decision makers must support** the relationship. Within educational institutions the vice president, dean, or director of continuing education must stand behind a major partnership, and in those associations with professional staff and volunteer officers, those at the top of both structures must favor the relationship. A "godfather" at a high level in each of the partnering organizations can provide support when it is needed and ensure that the relationship is given proper priority as the need arises.

- Insofar as possible, **stable organizational environments and/or broad-based support** should be available so that changes in organizational priorities, leadership, or resources do not threaten the partnership. Such was not the case in one institutional/professional association partnership, for example. When the association underwent some restructuring and the staff member responsible for continuing education left the organization, no one remaining on the staff

felt any sense of commitment to the relationship. Despite the fact that the partnership was producing commendable results that benefited both parties, it slowly disintegrated for lack of support within the association.

Desirable Criteria

Below are examples of *desirable*, but not essential, criteria. These are criteria to be considered in selecting partners, but a potential partner that is well-qualified in other areas would not be eliminated for failure to meet one or more of these criteria. Desirable criteria may facilitate establishment and implementation of a partnership, but they are not required for success.

- The profession or content area(s) represented by the association must be **represented by an academic unit** within the college or university. If development of educational programming is an objective, we will need access to faculty in the field. Obtaining the commitment of qualified faculty members may be easier if they are part of our institution.
- A **faculty member with close ties to the professional association** can be an invaluable asset in gaining an initial hearing with association leaders, and in convincing them that the proposed partnership will benefit the association.
- **Continuing education is mandated for practice or for credentialing**. Those professions in which lifelong education is required are more likely to consider development of meaningful continuing education as an important member service. Hence they are more likely to view a potential alliance with higher education positively.
- The profession includes a **critical mass of practitioners.** If a professional field is small, it may not include enough people to make programming, needs assessment, or other activities financially feasible.

PRECONDITIONS OF INTERACTION

Organizations are affected by the environments in which they operate. Because the environment fluctuates, organizations are in a constant state of change. Before seeking to establish a partnership with another organization, it is important to learn about that organization. What is its history, what are its specific goals, and who are the key decision makers? What is the organizational culture? Is the association one that is content with the status quo, does it seek to differentiate itself through specialization or excellence, or is it future-oriented, preparing for the socio-economic, technological, scientific, and other changes on the horizon? How do the organizational culture and mission complement or dovetail with our own emphases? Knowledge of an association, the ways in which it is changing, and its future directions can help us decide if it is the right partner for us.

Partnerships between higher education and professional associations are partnerships between organizations, not individuals, so that representatives of both organizations must be able to speak for the groups they represent. Prior to embarking on the search for a partner, we need to ensure that our institutional support includes a clear definition of when we can speak for the institution, and a clear path to those who can speak on behalf of our college or university when we cannot do so. We should expect no less from our partner; we are reasonable in requesting that any representatives of the association be empowered to speak for that association in our day-to-day operations and decision-making, and that they have ready access to association leadership for those issues on which they cannot speak with authority.

Environmental Changes Can Lead to Partnerships

An environmental disturbance of some sort is necessary to cause two organizations that have worked separately for some time to come together (Lindsay, Queeney, and Smutz, 1981). By identifying the environmental disturbances, or changes, that have led to our pursuit of a partnership, we can help prospective partners see the value in the relationship we propose. Examples of environmental disturbances that might lead higher education institutions and professional associations to become partners include:

- increased public demands for professional accountability
- a diminishing pool of traditional higher education students
- increased demands from professionals and their employers for continuing education with direct relevance to professional practice
- the national agenda for workforce training
- the need for education to enable workers to change careers, specialize within their current fields, or deal with dislocation
- regulations requiring continuing professional education
- increased financial challenges for higher education

BASES OF INTERACTION

Two major factors constitute the bases on which partnerships may be formed. The first are *motivators*, factors that lead us to think about building an interactive relationship. Motivators are necessary, but not sufficient, to cause organizations to form interactive relationships. Resource scarcity, which occurs when an organization's resource supply is disrupted or becomes inadequate, is an example of a motivator. If the organization wants to continue its current operations and perhaps move ahead, it must find a means of replacing the lost resources. A partnership can be one such means. Another motivator could be a professional association's need to reverse a drop in membership.

If motivators cause us to consider building partnerships, *determinants* lead us from interest to action, to actually forming active relationships. Determinants make interaction compelling, so that each organization realizes that it truly needs the relationship, and at the same time recognizes that the preconditions necessary for such a partnership are met. To reach this point, each organization must have some uncommitted resources to contribute to the relationship. The participating organizations must have somewhat different operational objectives so that they won't find themselves in conflict over resources and clients. They also need to have domain consensus, in which each organization recognizes the other's right to particular activities.

The initial problem is determining which organizations, and which subsystems within them, have the motivators and determinators that allow them to be ready to collaborate. A selection process using specific criteria, as described earlier, is helpful in identifying, exploring, discussing, and confirming this readiness to collaborate (Lindsay, Queeney, and Smutz, 1981).

STRUCTURING PARTNERSHIPS

A STRONG FOUNDATION IS KEY

Once an appropriate partner has been identified, the foundation for the partnership must be carefully constructed. Both parties should be quite clear about the relationship they are building, so that neither group is surprised as their interaction unfolds. The more specific the expectations agreed upon initially, the less room there is for misunderstanding later.

FORM OF INTERACTION

Before setting out to establish any interactive relationship, we have to define the form of interaction we are seeking, ensuring that it is compatible with the goals toward which the partnership is to work. Interaction can be viewed as a continuum from complete independence at one end to merged organizations at the other end. Between these two extremes are many points. As we think about partnerships, three of these are key: *cooperation, coordination,* and *collaboration.*

- **Cooperation:** Organizations assist each other on an ad hoc basis. For example, a state association for social workers occasionally calls a continuing higher educator to obtain information on available programming, and when the state instituted a continuing education requirement, the continuing educator called the association to obtain the most up-to-date information on the requirements for that education.

- **Coordination:** The activities of each partner consistently take into account those of the other organization. After a state university developed a program for accountants and sold it to their national professional association, the two groups agreed that the university would retain the right to offer the program within its own state, whereas the association would offer it everywhere else.

- **Collaboration:** Organizations work together jointly and continuously on a particular project toward a specific goal. In one project conducted at a large eastern state university, fourteen state and national professional associations collaborated with that university over a five-year time span, developing and implementing a needs assessment/program development model.

As we move through these three points on the interaction continuum, from the least interactive (cooperation) to the most interdependent (collaboration), four factors increase:

(1) the value of resources required,

(2) the formal time commitment,

(3) the specificity of the goals driving the relationship, and

(4) the restriction of each partner's organizational autonomy.

If we intend to work with our partners over time, on a shared basis, collaboration probably is indicated. However, this is not a decision to be undertaken lightly. If we are to collaborate with our new partners, we must expect to devote substantial resources to the endeavor—the establishment and maintenance of collaboration is time-consuming and thus fairly resource intensive, regardless of the goals of the relationship. Collaboration involves shared decision-making, meaning that we must be prepared to relinquish some of our authority and autonomy, yielding to our partners as we strive to achieve consensus or other forms of agreement.

APPROACHING POTENTIAL PARTNERS

INTERNAL SUPPORT STRENGTHENS YOUR INSTITUTION'S POSITION

Having developed a set of both essential and desirable criteria to suit a given situation, we can review our list of potential partners, narrowing it down to a handful who most closely meet our criteria. Through further investigation and discussion we may eliminate some of those on this shorter list, or we may choose to pursue conversations with all of them before selecting one or more partners. If we are seeking a single partner, we may prioritize the associations on our list, talking with only one at a time until we have found our partner.

It is highly desirable to talk with faculty members and/or administrators in our institution's academic departments most closely related to a professional association prior to approaching the association itself. Obtaining the support of those within our institutions can strengthen our position when we meet with association representatives. They may appreciate the involvement of those who teach and do research in the field, recognizing that their members could benefit from interaction with them. Those in the academic department may be able to prepare us for our initial meeting with association representatives, telling us about the key players, organizational structure and priorities, and other relevant factors. We may even find it beneficial to have a faculty member accompany us to our meeting with the professional association, particularly if that faculty member is known to association leaders or is particularly well respected in the field.

The initial approach to the professional association is critical. There is no single right way of opening the dialogue, but there are some guidelines. The yearly schedules, or cycles, of some professional associations make it advantageous to approach them at a particular time of year. Training calendar publication, annual conferences, fiscal year dates, and board of directors' meetings all can be factors affecting the timing of an association's level of receptivity to a new idea. Perhaps most important is being fully prepared with both knowledge of the association and a well-developed proposal for partnership. In advance of making the first contact we should learn all that we can about the association and its structure, leaders, priorities, current activities, and climate for continuing education (e.g., who provides it and how well, how it is regulated). It also is helpful to understand the role of the professional association in providing education, accrediting programs or providers, or credentialing practitioners. We should know enough about the association not only to be thoroughly prepared for a meeting, but also to determine that this group would be an appropriate partner. (Although I suppose it is not unheard of for a continuing educator to state, after meeting with association leaders, that the group would not, after all, be a good match for the proposed project, one wins few friends by such actions.) Our proposal should be very clear regarding what we hope to accomplish, and how we would like to do it. It also needs to be flexible. Although it's advisable to present concrete ideas for the proposed partnership, we should be open to suggestions from the association.

Because each professional association is different, the approach that works for one group can be less appropriate for another. We may choose to first write to the key leader in an association, indicating that we are seeking a partner to collaborate on a project, briefly described, and stating that we shall call within a few days to schedule a meeting. Another approach is to telephone the person directly, state our purpose, entertain any initial questions they might have, and then ask to schedule a meeting. If we have a faculty member or other colleague with close ties to individuals in the

association, we can ask that person to make the initial contact and request a meeting. Usually it is advisable to bring two higher education representatives to the meeting so that they can work together to build a case for the partnership. Conversely, we should ask that they bring two or three of their key leaders. There may be occasions on which the group grows slightly larger, but it is important to maintain a fairly even balance of representation of the two groups so that neither feels overpowered.

INITIATING THE FIRST MEETING

As initiators of the first meeting we should be prepared to lay out our proposal for a partnership. The discussion should cover the following points:

- the goals of the proposed partnership
- our reasons for inviting this particular association to join with us
- the strengths, resources, and other assets we would bring to the relationship
- what we would expect the association to bring to the relationship
- the manner in which we propose that our two organizations would work together, including the factors discussed in the next section
- the benefits to the association of joining with us in this partnership

We should provide clear, succinct, attractive written materials to accompany our presentation and discussion, so that the association representatives will have something to take into later discussions with other association members and staff.

If, at the conclusion of this first meeting, the association representatives indicate that they will take our proposal to other leaders, staff, and board members, we will have had a successful meeting. It is reasonable to ask them for an indication of the length of time involved in their further consideration of the proposal. They may invite us to present our ideas to their board of directors, or they may contact us for additional information at some point. Deliberations can be expected to take some time, up to several months. It is common for association leaders to consult a broad base of people, and their boards of directors, who usually must act on such a proposal, may meet infrequently.

One professional association representative notes that her group would welcome proposals for partnerships with colleges and universities, but observes that to this point, "it hasn't happened. Other groups have stepped in to fill our needs, and have gotten ahead of higher education on the bandwagon." The more well-established, larger professional associations appear to receive more invitations to enter into partnerships with higher education and, perhaps because they are sought-after partners, they sometimes challenge us to sell ourselves. In approaching these groups it is easy, but unwise, to feel put on the defensive.

MAKING THE PARTNERSHIP WORK

Once the partnership has been defined and the partner selected, the challenge of making the partnership work in a productive, effective manner remains. As noted above, it is important to plan for smooth operation of the partnership. While all of this detail may appear overly compulsive, by specifying the manner in which the partners will work together we are able to avoid pitfalls down the road.

ESTABLISHING AN AGREEMENT

Some form of agreement is needed to acknowledge the relationship into which the organizations are entering. This agreement will establish basic understanding and reduce the chances of conflict. An agreement can be either formal or implicit, depending on the nature of the interaction and on the organizational level at which the agreement will be entered into. In most cases, for the lower levels of interaction such as cooperation or coordination, subcomponent representatives can enter into a partnership agreement. When higher levels of interaction or partnership are intended, people at the highest levels of the organizations should be involved in establishment of the agreement, and the agreement will be a more formal, written document. The greater the resources that are to be committed, the more necessary it is that the partners enter into a formal agreement at a higher organizational level. In many cases, legal counsel for both parties will review the agreement for consistency with association or institutional policy, as well as to ensure that no ambiguous or potentially negative arrangements are suggested.

An agreement may contain a number of different elements. One of the most important to be addressed is commitment of resources, including expertise, time, reputation, materials, facilities, and money. For any type of partnership to be successful, both parties must contribute to the relationship, quite literally buying into it. The extent of resources to be committed should be specified in the agreement, as should the character of those resources. In determining the commitment of resources, participating parties must decide whether the relationship will be symmetrical or asymmetrical; that is, is resource exchange to flow equally in both directions (symmetry) or is it going to be more in one direction than in the other (asymmetry)?

The agreement also must indicate a mutually accepted set of responsibilities for each party. For example, a decision must be made regarding which organization will act as a catalyst for the interaction. Organizations may interact without much guidance, mutually adjusting to one another, but this is highly unlikely. Each organization may contribute to a form of shared governance, or guidance, or a separate party may assume responsibility for activating and maintaining interaction. However, most frequently one of the organizations in the partnership is responsible for guiding the interaction. If we are initiators of the interaction, it may be logical for us to provide coordination and leadership to the partnership, whatever its form.

A time frame, or schedule, is another important component of a partnership agreement. Relationships take a long time to build, and this should not be underestimated. However, the goal of the partnership, the project that has brought the organizations together, is a key factor in determining how long the work will take. It also should be remembered that use of consensus, critical to collaboration and to other intensive forms of interaction, can delay progress. Finally, participating organizations must be aware that they cannot allow their own cumbersome organization procedures to slow things down, or they will jeopardize the relationship. The parties may wish to build in an ongoing, formative, evaluation system to identify those factors that help and hinder the partnership as it progresses.

Depending on the nature of the partnership, other elements also may be specified in an agreement. These can include distribution of any revenues generated, copyright holdings, use of data collected in the course of the partnership, authorship attribution, involvement of third parties, and any other issues that could impinge on the relationship.

INTERACTION PROCESS

Some type of linkage mechanism, or structure, is needed to guide the partnership's operation. Committees, boards of directors, specially formed project staffs, advisory groups, and project teams are examples of linkage mechanisms. A linkage mechanism can be formal or it can be loosely defined, depending substantially on the type of interaction that is anticipated. Several factors should be considered in selecting the linkage mechanism, including the extent and character of the resources that are to be committed, the complexity of the issues to be addressed, and the frequency with which the organizations will interact. The potential for conflict between participating organizations is reduced by a formal linkage mechanism, because the creation of such a mechanism means that agreement has been reached on a number of issues and authority exists in the form of fixed rules.

In developing collaborative relationships, the project team approach merits special consideration as a linkage mechanism. In forming a team the higher education institution and the professional association each name two or three (or more, if desirable to accomplish the tasks involved) representatives to the project team. The team process allows for equal participation by both organizations, and allows each group to involve people who have the special knowledge, skills, and experience needed to address the project at hand. In addition to these strengths, team members must have access to key decision makers, a thorough understanding of the organization they represent, and the ability to speak for that organization. It is important to remember that the team members are not representing themselves, but their organizations. To avoid having to backtrack, as well as to facilitate progress and ensure continuity, whenever possible team members should remain the same rather than rotating over time.

A group process consultant or facilitator may be used to establish a collegial environment and promote shared decision making and operation by consensus. With the team members or the person serving as catalyst for the group, the facilitator can develop a meeting schedule and an agenda for each meeting. In addition, he or she can be expected to keep the group focused on the issues and to see that timelines are observed and deadlines are met.

In addition to the team members appointed to represent each partner, staff members may be required to carry out the work of the partnership. A partnership champion can be the person to provide motivation and spark to the partnership. Lieutenants will do the work that is necessary to carry out the partnership, aided by a capable support staff of motivated workers to handle specific tasks. Finally, attracting appropriate faculty members to such a partnership can be important in promoting the higher education institution's educational mission.

ENDING THE PARTNERSHIP

If the goal of the partnership has been clearly articulated and well understood by both parties, attainment of that goal will be recognized by both organizations and their representatives, signaling an end to the agreed-upon partnership. However, it also is possible that unforeseen circumstances can cause a premature conclusion to the relationship, or that a decision is made to continue the partnership, with a new or expanded goal, beyond the original time frame and purpose.

Often a prematurely terminated partnership indicates dissatisfaction with the relationship. If the

cause of these problems can be caught early and turned around, the partnership may be saved, but if the dissatisfaction becomes pervasive there may be no advantage to trying to salvage a struggling partnership. In other cases, internal problems within one of the participating organizations may necessitate a redirection of that group's energies and withdrawal from the relationship.

CONCLUSION

PARTNERSHIPS OPEN DOORS TO NEW AUDIENCES

By establishing partnerships with professional associations at state, regional, or national levels, continuing higher education units can open doors to serving new audiences in new ways. The current growth of knowledge in virtually all professions, increased specialization within professions, daily changing opportunities offered by technology, expanded regulation of several professions, the need for professionals to adapt their skills to new practice settings and even new jobs, and the realization that preprofessional education no longer can serve an individual throughout his or her career all point to new and more challenging opportunities for continuing higher education. However, we simply do not possess the resources to do it all alone. Building alliances with professional associations offers us the opportunity to produce more meaningful education with the potential to significantly improve practice.

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